

DENTON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

A child in your child's school has been diagnosed with pertussis, also called "whooping cough." Since students are required to be immunized against pertussis (that is the "P" in the DTP or DTaP shot) most students will have some protection against this disease. There is still, however, a chance that a child could become infected even with the protection of the vaccine.

Pertussis begins like a cold, with a runny nose, sneezing, mild fever, and cough that slowly gets worse. After one to two weeks, the cough gets worse and usually starts to occur in strong "coughing-fits." This type of coughing may last for six or more weeks. There is generally no fever at this time. In young children, coughing fits are often followed by a whooping sound as they try to catch their breath. After coughing, a person may have difficulty catching their breath, may experience vomiting, or become blue in the face from lack of air. The coughing spells may be so bad that it is hard for babies to eat, drink, or breathe. The cough is often worse at night, and cough medicines usually do not help to reduce the cough. Between coughing spells, the person often appears to be well. Some babies may only have apnea (failure to breathe) and can die from this. Adults, teens, and vaccinated children often have milder symptoms that mimic bronchitis or asthma. Not all patients will experience all symptoms. Symptoms can range from severe to mild.

Whooping cough can be a very serious disease, particularly for infants less than one year of age. Since it is quite contagious, the disease can easily spread through the air from a sick person during talking, sneezing, or coughing. Any person with symptoms should not be allowed to come to school until completion of five days of appropriate antibiotic therapy. If your child does not have symptoms, he or she cannot transmit it to anyone at home – a person must be coughing to give pertussis to others.

The Denton County Health Department is asking parents to check their children's shot records to be sure they have received all of their shots. If you are not sure if your child is completely immunized, contact your family doctor or the Denton County Health Department (940-349-2900) to bring your child's immunizations up to date as soon as possible. Children younger than age 7 who are unvaccinated or who have fewer than four doses of DTaP vaccine should be vaccinated according to the recommended schedule. Vaccinations are generally given at 2 months, 4 months, and 6 months, with a booster at 4 years. The Denton County Health Department offers immunizations regardless of ability to pay.

If you have questions about symptoms your child might be having, please contact your doctor. If you are taking your child to the doctor's office for symptoms of pertussis, please take this letter with you.

Thank you,

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